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ABSTRACT

A joint project of the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles Unified School District, Project DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) is designed to equip elementary and junior high school children with the skills for resisting peer pressure to experiment with drugs and alcohol. The goal is to teach students how to say "no." A growing consensus among experts in education and medicine holds that substance abuse prevention must begin early, well before children have been led by their peers to experiment with drugs and alcohol. Most important, Project DARE introduces this training just at the time when the peer pressure begins. DARE's instructors are Los Angeles police officers on full-time duty with the project. Assigned to five schools per semester, the officers visit classrooms once a week to present an innovative curriculum developed by school district personnel. Veteran police officers with several years of street experience, the DARE instructors have a credibility unmatched by regular classroom teachers. Through the DARE lessons, students learn that: real friends will not push them into trying drugs and alcohol; the majority of their peers do not use these substances; being grown up means making their own decisions and coping with problems in a positive way; and they can assert themselves in the face of peer pressure. The DARE curriculum is organized into 17 classroom sessions in which a wide range of teaching activities are used that are designed to encourage student participation and response. (ABL)

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National Institute of Justice / Research in Action

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Project DARE: Teaching kids to say "no" to drugs and alcohol

by William DeJong

Dear Chief Gates,

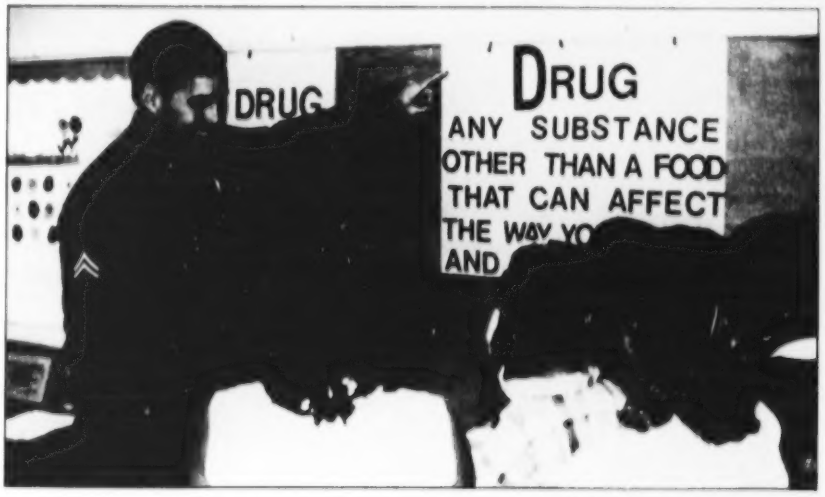
I have learned to say no to drugs and never take drugs. It messes your life up and the people who take drugs are stupid.

I was offered drugs and I said no. He put it in my face, and I took it and stepped on it and hit him. He said it was good. I thought about Officer Sumpter and how he said to say no.

Shawn, Fifth Grade

Shawn's letter, and thousands of equally enthusiastic letters from other fifth and sixth grade students, bring a smile of satisfaction to Los Angeles Chief of Police Daryl F. Gates. Shawn, a recent graduate of Project DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education), obviously learned his lessons well.

A joint project of the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles Unified School District, Project DARE is designed to equip elementary and junior high school children with the skills for resisting peer pressure to experiment with drugs and alcohol. The goal, in short, is to teach kids how to say "no." A growing consensus among experts in education and medicine holds that substance abuse prevention must begin early, well before children have been led by their peers to experiment with drugs and alcohol. Most important, Project DARE introduces this training just at the time when the peer pressure begins.[1]



A Los Angeles elementary school class listens as Police Officer Thomas Lendzion points out the dangers of early drug and alcohol use. He is one of 19 Project DARE team members teaching in L.A. schools. Eventually, the team will be expanded to 53 to cover all elementary schools in the city.

DARE's instructors are Los Angeles police officers on full-time duty with the project. Assigned to five schools per semester, the officers visit their classrooms once a week to present an innovative curriculum developed by school district personnel. Veteran police officers with several years of street experience, the DARE instructors have a credibility unmatched by regular classroom teachers. Equally important, the officers are good teachers. They are carefully selected by DARE's supervisory staff and then fully trained by health specialists from the school district. The DARE supervisors make frequent visits to monitor the instructors' classroom performance.

Project DARE began when Chief Gates approached the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Harry Handler, in January 1983 to enlist support for a cooperative effort to combat drug and alcohol use. Traditional law enforcement efforts to control the distribution and sale of illicit drugs on school campuses, primarily through periodic "drug busts," made little impact and alienated students and school personnel from police. Chief Gates suggested that a new approach, focused on prevention, and designed to build trust between the schools and law enforcement, was needed. Dr. Handler agreed. A task force comprised of police and school personnel was appointed to develop the Project DARE training program.

Chief Gates has assigned 19 line officers to the project, with plans to increase that number to 53 to extend coverage to every elementary school in Los Angeles. A junior high school curriculum, coupled with early intervention counseling of high-risk students by school counselors, is also being implemented. When it is fully in place, Project DARE will reach more than 250,000 school children annually.

William DeJong is a research analyst specializing in the fields of education and criminal justice. An independent consultant, Dr. DeJong's present clients include the Education Development Center and Abt Associates. He is the author of several monographs and journal articles in the fields of criminal justice, education, and research methodology.

[1] D.B. Kandel and J.A. Logan, "Patterns of Drug Use from Adolescence to Young Adulthood: I. Periods of Risk for Initiation, Continued Use, and Discontinuation," *American Journal of Public Health* 74 (1984).

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, provides staff support to coordinate the activities of the following program Offices and Bureaus: National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and Office for Victims of Crime.

Chief Gates believes that Project DARE is good policing, well worth the commitment of department resources. If elementary and junior high school students can say "no" to drugs, demand for illicit drugs will drop, and drug-related street crime will be reduced. At stake, he asserts, is the future. "The police must work with the schools and the private sector to secure that future for today's kids," Chief Gates emphasizes.

Building self-esteem

Officer Bill Guerrero, unarmed, but in full uniform, holds up a bright red balloon for his class to examine. The students are attentive, obviously enjoying their sixth Project DARE lesson.

"This is our self-esteem balloon," Officer Guerrero says, smiling. "When good things happen to us, our self-esteem balloon grows." He blows up the balloon.

"But when bad things happen to us, what happens to our self-esteem balloon? That's right." He lets out all the air, making a loud rasp. The kids laugh.

"Everyone does something well," the officer continues. "Identifying our own strengths is important in building a positive self-image. We don't have to rely on others to blow up our self-esteem balloon. By pumping up our own self-esteem, we can take more control over our own behavior."

Officer Guerrero than reads "Bill's Balloon," a story designed to show that a child's experiences can either strengthen or weaken self-esteem, represented by the balloon.

"7:00 a.m. Bill wakes up, gets out of bed, and walks toward the bathroom. He discovers that it is already occupied by his sister. He hears his mother call to him, 'Bill, you leave her alone and stop picking on her.'"

The officer holds up the balloon. "What happens to Bill's self-esteem?"

"It goes down!" two or three students call out.

"9:00 a.m. Bill goes to class. The teacher asks for his homework. He tells her that he forgot to do it. The teacher reminds him that it will count against his grade in work habits." Officer Guerrero looks expectantly at the class. "What happens?"

"Down!"

"10:30 a.m. Bill meets his friends during nutrition class. One of the boys in the group teases him about not wanting to smoke cigarettes after basketball yesterday. Bill ignores him."

"Up!"

"That's right!" Officer Guerrero fills the balloon until it is ready to burst.

Officer Guerrero is a gifted teacher but not an unusual one for Project DARE. The reasons for this excellence are clear: careful selection and rigorous training.

Through an 80-hour seminar prepared and taught by school district personnel, all new DARE instructors become well versed in a variety of teaching techniques, counseling strategies, and classroom management. A key component of their training is preparing and teaching one of the DARE lesson plans to fellow trainees. Upon completion of their training, the new instructors receive a vocational teaching certificate from the State of California. Normally, DARE instructors stay with the program for 2 or 3 years before reassignment.

Inservice training guarantees that the instructors' skills remain sharply honed. During the school year, the instructors hold biweekly meetings to discuss and solve classroom problems. In addition, once each year, the instructors attend a week-long training session to refresh their training and refine the curriculum.

The instructors' work extends beyond the classroom. Recess is spent on the playground with the students, helping them get to know the police officers as friends. Time is also set aside for meetings with principals and teachers to discuss their concerns. For parents, an evening session provides information on symptoms of drug use, ways to improve family communication, and counseling resources.

Being "Officer DARE" is hard work but, without exception, the instructors find that the personal rewards are tremendous. Quite simply, the kids love them.

Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl F. Gates introduces Project DARE to assembled children at the Lorne Avenue Elementary School. The importance of the program is underscored by the participation of California Governor George Deukmejian, seated next to Chief Gates. Police Officer Joel Price is on the right and Superintendent of Schools Harry Handler is in the background.

Learning how to resist pressure

Why do young teenagers so often experiment with harmful substances?[2] Drug and alcohol use among adolescents typically begins in a social setting involving peers or relatives.[3] Unfortunately, adolescents are often more concerned with their acceptance within a peer group than with the long-term risks of their behavior. Traditional drug abuse programs dwell on drug identification and the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol. With Project DARE, the emphasis is on helping students recognize and resist the sometimes subtle pressures that cause them to experiment with alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs.[4]

Through the DARE lessons, students learn that:

- Real friends will not push them into trying drugs and alcohol.
- Contrary to popular myth, the majority of their peers do not use these substances.
- Being grown up means making their own decisions and coping with problems in a positive way.
- They can assert themselves in the face of peer pressure.

The lessons also stress that a child who feels good about himself, who can communicate his feelings, who can foresee the consequences of his behavior, and who can identify alternatives to drug use will be better prepared to resist the temptation to try drugs and alcohol.

Ways to say no

a. Saying "No thanks"	"Would you like a drink?" "No thanks."
b. Giving a reason or excuse	"Would you like a beer?" "No thanks. I don't like the taste."
c. Broken record or saying no as many times as necessary	"Would you like a hit?" "No thanks." "Come on!" "No thanks." "Just try it!" "No thanks."
d. Walking away	"Do you want to try some marijuana?" Say no and walk away while saying it.
e. Changing the subject	"Let's smoke some marijuana." "I hear there's a new video game at the arcade."
f. Avoid the situation	If you know of places where people often use drugs, stay away from those places. If you pass them on the way home, go another way.
g. Cold shoulder	"Do you want a beer?" Just ignore the person.
h. Strength in numbers	Hang around with nonusers, especially where drug use is expected.

The DARE curriculum is organized into 17 classroom sessions conducted by the police officer, coupled with suggested activities taught by the regular classroom teacher. A wide range of teaching activities are used—question and answer, group discussion, role play, workbook exercises, all designed to encourage student participation and response.

The following brief summaries of each lesson capture the scope of the DARE curriculum and show the care taken in its preparation. All of these lessons were pilot tested and revised before widespread use began.

1. Practices for personal safety. The DARE officer reviews common safety practices to protect students from harm at home, on the way to and from school, and in the neighborhood.

2. Drug use and misuse. Students learn the harmful effects of drugs if they are misused, as depicted in a film, "Drugs and Your Amazing Mind."

3. Consequences. The focus is on the consequences of using or choosing not to use alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs. If students are aware of those consequences, they can make better informed decisions regarding their own behavior.

4. Resisting pressures to use drugs. The DARE officer explains different types of pressure that friends and others exert on students to get them to try alcohol or drugs, ranging from friendly persuasion and teasing to threats.

5. Resistance techniques: ways to say no. Students rehearse the many ways of refusing offers to try alcohol or drugs—simply saying "no" and repeating it as often as necessary; changing the subject; walking away or ignoring the person. They learn that they can avoid situations where they might be subjected to such pressure and can "hang around" with nonusers.

6. Building self-esteem. Poor self-esteem is one of the factors associated with drug misuse. How the students feel about themselves results from positive

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[2] According to a 1983 survey of graduating high school seniors, approximately one-third reported having used an illicit drug within the last 30 days. L.D. Johnston, P.M. O'Malley, and J.G. Bachman, *Drugs and American High School Students 1975–1983* (Rockville, Maryland: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1984).

[3] J.M. Polich, P.L. Ellickson, P. Reuter, and J.P. Kahan, *Strategies for Controlling Adolescent Drug Use* (Santa Monica, California: Rand, 1984).

[4] Four programs that are similar but do not involve police officers as instructors are reviewed by G.J. Botvin and T.A. Wills, "Personal and Social Skills Training: Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches to Substance Abuse Prevention," in *Prevention Research: Deterring Drug Abuse Among Children and Adolescents*, ed. by C.S. Bell and R. Battjes (Rockville, Maryland: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1985).

and negative feelings and experiences. They learn to see their own positive qualities and discover ways to compliment others.

7. Assertiveness: a response style. Students have certain rights—to be themselves, to say what they think, to say no to offers of drugs. They must assert those rights confidently without also interfering with others' rights.

8. Managing stress without taking drugs. Students learn to recognize sources of stress in their lives and to develop techniques for avoiding or relieving it, including exercise, deep breathing, and talking to others. Using drugs or alcohol to relieve stress causes new problems.

9. Media influences on drug use. The DARE officer reviews strategies used in the media to encourage tobacco and alcohol use, including testimonials from celebrities and pressure to conform.

10. Decisionmaking and risk taking. Students learn the difference between bad risks and reasonable risks, how to recognize the choices they have, and how to make a decision that promotes their self-interest.

11. Alternatives to drug abuse. Drug and alcohol use are not the only way to have fun, to be accepted by peers, or to deal with feelings of anger or hurt.

12. Alternative activities. Sports or other physical fitness activities are good alternatives. Exercise improves health and relieves emotional distress.

13. Officer-planned lessons. The class is spent on a special lesson devised by the DARE officer himself.

14. Role modeling. A high school student selected by the DARE officer visits the class, providing students with a positive role model. Students learn that drug users are in the minority.

15. Project DARE summary. Students summarize and assess what they have learned.

16. Taking a stand. Students compose and read aloud essays on how they can respond when they are pressured to use drugs and alcohol. The essay represents each student's "DARE Pledge."

17. Assembly. In a schoolwide assembly, planned in concert with school administrators, all students who participated in Project DARE receive certificates of achievement.

> Dear Chief Gates,
>
> I really enjoyed the DARE program because the officers were very nice and made you feel comfortable when you asked dumb questions. Thank you for telling the officers to come to our school and for giving us the nicest ones!
>
> I really think that the DARE program is a super neat thing and I will resist drugs and will not get addicted for as long as I live. I will always remember the nice officers who came to our school.
>
> Never Using Drugs,
> Olga, Sixth Grade

Project DARE represents a major financial investment on the part of both the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles Unified School District. Public officials are convinced, however, that this cost is inconsequential when compared to the price Los Angeles pays each year in ruined lives and street crime caused by substance abuse.

Vigorous efforts by the police department have led to growing corporate foundation support. Efforts to generate donations from private citizens are underway, aided greatly by in-kind contributions from a California ad agency that designed promotional materials. In Los Angeles, both private and public resources stand ready to combat drug and alcohol abuse by the city's young people.

Can other cities adopt the DARE approach? Successful replication of Project DARE hinges on strong cooperation between local schools and law enforcement. In many cities, building that cooperation may appear to be an insurmountable obstacle. But, as Chief Gates has shown, the police can make the first move.

Since its inception, Project DARE has served as a model program for agencies throughout the country. To assist other communities in developing programs to meet their needs, DARE has developed a training class open to officials from other jurisdictions.

For additional information, contact:

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Police Officer Lorrie Bostic carries the Project DARE lessons to the playground.